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Schelkens, K.

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“Le plus aristocratique des goûts” Modernist, Orientalist and Anti-Semitic Bible Readings in Late Nineteenth-Century Belgium¹

Karim SCHELKENS
Tilburg University

As a Catholic Church historian, I have always considered the modernist crisis as a crucial period of transition *within* Roman Catholicism, marked by painful struggles and circling around the attempts at reconciling scientific methodology and the Christian faith tradition². More precisely, the modernist crisis constitutes the transition from a church that seeks a way of dealing with modernity and its critical spirit and attitude. It is an attitude that, among others, has led to the development of the historical-critical method, now applied to the very sources of Christianity. For Yves Congar the collision between the hierarchy (and the so-called ‘traditionalist’ theologians defending it) and those that would eventually be labeled “modernists” was the consequence of the discordance between the doctrines imposed by the Magisterium and the conclusions of a scientific study of the documentation referred to by that same Magisterium as the foundation for their doctrinal statements³.

1. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Bart Coppein for his willingness to revise and comment on the foregoing manuscript. Also, I wish to thank Mrs. Hermione L’Amiral, for allowing me to access the files on Picard in the Archives of the Belgian Senate [ABS], and Mr. Jan Anckaer for granting us access to the Belgian Library of Parliament, which holds one of the rare collections of *Journal de Bruxelles*. Prof. Dr. Leo Kenis has given his kind permission to make good use of the Faculty of Theology Archives [AFT], and Mr. Jo Landuyt has made it possible for me to investigate material documenting A.J. Delattre’s career in the Jesuit Archives [ABSE]. I have also been able to make use of sources in the Archives of the Diocese of Bruges [ADB] and in the Archives of the Catholic University of Leuven [AKUL].

2. K. SCHELKENS, *The Louvain Faculty of Theology and the Modern(ist) Heritage: Reconciling History and Theology*, in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 104 (2009) 856-891. This is also the case with many other Church historians, see for instance the landmark study of É. FOUILLOUX, *Une église en quête de liberté: La pensée catholique française entre modernisme et Vatican II (1914-1962)*, Paris, 2006; T.M. LOOME, *Liberal Catholicism, Reform Catholicism, Modernism: A Contribution to a New Orientation in Modernist Research* (Tübinger theologische Studien, 14), Mainz, 1979. I should also mention, for the more social component of Catholic modernism, excellent studies such as those by É. POULAT, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral: Un réseau secret international moderniste, la Sapinière 1909-1921* (Religion et sociétés), Tournai, 1969.

3. Y. CONGAR, *La Tradition et les traditions: Essai historique*, Paris, 1961.

Long before the official condemnation of modernism in *Pascendi dominici gregis*⁴, the hierarchy's defensive attitude was already felt under Pope Pius IX, who, in his famous *Syllabus errorum* and his encyclical *Quanta cura*, condemned "modern errors" such as rationalism, Gallicanism, socialism, naturalism, and liberalism⁵. Both documents were issued precisely one year after the appearance of Ernest Renan's notorious but immensely popular *Vie de Jésus*⁶. These papal doctrines would remain the blueprint of an overall defensive and at times outrightly aggressive style. It is a style that would only be abandoned with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The present contribution cannot offer a full overview of the Catholic modernist crisis, neither will it offer a stylistic analysis of the Church's attitudes and announcements in the same era. Rather, I choose to present a single case in some detail. I will focus on three Belgian actors, all of them involved with biblical interpretation in a very particular way. None of these protagonists has been the object of recent study. I will not deal with the theological relevance of the topics, but focus on the interactions and/or differences distinguishing the *dramatis personae*. One of these protagonists was a non-Catholic and even a non-religious person, the Belgian lawyer and politician Edmond Picard. By including Picard the perspective of modernism beyond ecclesiastical circles is expanded.

EDMOND PICARD (1836-1924)⁷

Edmond Picard remains something of a *cas unique* – both in political and juridical history. Born in 1836 in Brussels in a family of five children,

4. PIUS X, *Litterae encyclicae Pascendi de modernistarum doctrinis*, in ASS 40 (1907) 622-639.

5. It should also be mentioned that the pontificate of Pius IX is known for its stress on the conversion of Jews toward Catholicism, as witnessed by the Edgardo Levi Mortara-affair.

6. E. RENAN, *Vie de Jésus*, Paris, 1863. On Renan's work, see F. LAPLANCHE, *Renan et l'exégèse biblique: De l'histoire sainte à l'histoire des religions*, in R. URIAC (ed.), *Actes des journées d'étude d'Ernest Renan (13-15 mars 1992)*, Saint Brieuc, 1992, 83-99, p. 87.

7. For the part on Picard, I owe much to the pioneering research of B. COPPEIN, *Edmond Picard (1836-1924), actor en getuige van een veranderend Belgische rechtsdenken in Europees perspectief aan het einde van de negentiende eeuw* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Law), Leuven, 2010; ID., *Edmond Picard (1836-1924), avocat bruxellois et belge par excellence de la deuxième moitié de la XIX^e siècle*, in V. BERNAUDEAU et al. (eds.), *Les praticiens du droit du Moyen Âge à l'époque contemporaine: Approches prosopographiques (Belgique, Canada, France, Italie, Prusse)*, Rennes, 2008, 225-237.

In addition to Coppein, our major secondary sources are: F. RINGELHEIM, *Jurisconsulte de race* (Petites fugues), Brussels, 1999; J.P. ARNOLDI, *Edmond Picard, sénateur socialiste* (unpublished Master's Thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles), Brussels, 1966; P. TEITELBAUM, *Edmond Picard et l'antisémitisme* (unpublished Master's Thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles), Brussels, 1983. For general biographical information, see R. WARLOMONT, *Picard, Edmond-Désiré*, in *Biographie Nationale*, Vol. XXXIV, Brussels, 1968, col. 644-658; L. DUPONT, *Edmond Picard 1836-1924*, in C. FIJNAUT (ed.), *Gestalten uit het verleden*, Louvain – Deurne, 1993, 97-107.

he was the son of François-David Picard (1803-1869)⁸, a francophone lawyer at the bar of the Brussels court of appeal and a friend of Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen (1796-1862)⁹ and professor of Law at the recently established *Université Libre de Bruxelles*. His mother, Marie-Josèphe Moens, of Flemish background, was a devout Catholic¹⁰. This background would profoundly shape Picard's personality, turning him into a combination of an eloquent rhetorician with a tendency toward mysticism. That said, Picard was also known to be a quite hardheaded, provocative and rather adventurous character, who experienced difficulties with discipline at secondary school, which caused him to dropped out at the age of seventeen to become a sailor. He took up his studies again in the 1850s and turned out to be a gifted Law student. He obtained his doctorate in 1860 *summa cum laude*, and his aggregation four years later¹¹. He inscribed at the Brussels attorney bar, and became an assistant to the later Minister of Justice Jules Lejeune (1828-1911). After a short period as a lawyer at the Court of Appeal, he went on to become attorney at the Court of Cassation in Brussels in 1880, a function he would keep until 1920. In these years he devoted much of his efforts to the edition of his *opus magnum*, the *Pandectes belges*, a repertory of Belgian legislation and jurisdiction¹².

Some other elements of his biography should not be left unmentioned. In 1875 he solicited for the chair of Criminal Law at the Free University of Brussels, but much to his regret, he did not obtain it. When in the early 1890s protests rose against the doctrinary-liberal course taken by that University's Administrative Board, Picard figured among those who founded the *Université Nouvelle de Bruxelles* in 1894¹³, where he would teach "Encyclopedia of Law" and "Civil Law". It proves that he did not at all support the doctrinary wing of the Belgian Liberal Party¹⁴. This had some consequences for his political ambitions. Since 1882 Picard had ran for Senate on several occasions¹⁵ on a ticket of the Liberal Party, but his opinions were clearly

8. On Picard's wider background, see G. KURTH, *Notice sur la famille Picard: Spécialement pour la branche à laquelle appartient M. Edmond Picard 1525-1904*, Brussels, 1904, pp. 17-18.

9. See *Un homme au service d'une cause: Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen et l'Université Libre de Bruxelles*, in A. DÉSPY-MEYER, *Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen: L'homme, sa vie, sa légende. Bicentenaire d'une naissance*, Brussels, 1996.

10. See the dossier on Picard in the ABS, which also contains data on his family, and files regarding his interventions in the Senate.

11. E. PICARD, *Essai sur la certitude dans le droit naturel*, Brussels, 1864.

12. E. PICARD – N. D'HOFFSCHMIDT *et al.* (eds.), *Les pandectes belges: Répertoire de législation, de doctrine et de jurisprudence belge*, Brussels, 1878-1933.

13. See E. PICARD's, *Une nouvelle université à Bruxelles*, Brussels, 1894, 22 p.

14. For more information on the political turmoil of the era, see P. LEFEVRE, *De liberale partij als organisatie van 1846 tot 1914*, in A. VERHULST – H. HASQUIN (eds.), *Het liberalisme in België: Tweehonderd jaar geschiedenis*, Brussels, 1989, 75-82.

15. In the year 1882 Picard published his *Profession de foi politique*, Brussels, explaining the reasons why he enters the political field, imposing himself as a progressive liberal.

too progressive to obtain a seat. In 1885 he joined the Belgian Workers Party¹⁶. From 1894 to 1908 he was a provincial senator of the Provincial Council of Hainaut¹⁷. He left the Party after he had become highly contested for several reasons. Picard was less anticlerical than most of the members of the Socialist Party, and he was also more of a nationalist than an internationalist. On top of that, he had always supported King Leopold II's politics in Congo, and gradually developed a virulent anti-Semitism. This brings us to the history of Picard's role in biblical exegesis in Belgium.

For a large part, the origins of Picard's anti-Semitic opinions are to be traced back to his participation in a diplomatic journey to the pre-colonial sultanate of Morocco, between December 1887 and March 1888. The mission itself was of lesser importance, but Picard travelled a lot, triggering his later critics to say that: "il visite le pays comme un jardin zoologique, observant, avec l'œil de l'ethnologue averti, la race sémitique dans son milieu naturel, sous ses deux espèces, l'arabe et la juive"¹⁸. The first-hand experience of another civilization would prove to have a lasting impression on Picard. He kept a full diary of his journey, which led to a series of articles in *L'Art Moderne*, a periodical he had co-founded with Camille Lemonnier (1834-1913) and of which he was the editor¹⁹. Later on, these reports were published in one volume, under the title *El Moghreb al-Aksa*²⁰. Picard's initial bedazzlement was soon replaced by feelings of awe and even disgust for the state of the prisoners in Tanger, the central role of the Quran in Moroccan jurisdiction²¹, the deplorable state of medical care, the place of women in society, and so on. On top of that, his shocking experience with the poverty of the local population was contrasted by the richness and wealth he found in the Jewish quarter of Méquinez. Soon, Picard started to reflect on his experiences and concluded that the Semitic race was entirely cut off from civilization.

In the years to come, Picard would develop his theory, outlining an entirely revised version of world history based on racial antagonism, among others inspired by the work of Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931)²². For Picard,

16. On the larger socio-political historical background of this study, see C. STRIKWERDA, *A House Divided: Catholics, Socialists, and Flemish Nationalists in Nineteenth Century Belgium*, Lanham, MD, 1997; and L. WILS, *De politieke ontwikkeling in België 1870-1894*, in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 13, Haarlem, 1978, 164-206.

17. Cf. the archives of Albert Guislain in the Belgian State Archives, where some documents on the career of Picard are conserved.

18. RINGELHEIM, *Jurisconsulte de race* (n. 7), p. 46.

19. Picard was well versed in contemporary art and literature. He belonged to a circle that also included, among others, Maurice Maeterlinck, Georges Rodenbach and Émile Verhaeren. *L'Art Moderne* was established to counter the *l'Art pour l'Art* movement connected with the "Jeune Belgique" group of artists.

20. E. PICARD, *El Moghreb al-Aksa: Une mission belge au Maroc*, Brussels, 1893, 427 p.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

22. G. LE BON, *La civilisation des Arabes*, Paris, 1884. See also the biography written by E. PICARD, *Gustave Le Bon et son œuvre*, Paris, 1909, pp. 32, 64.

race had become a key factor in understanding and describing the evolution of law and civilization as a whole. And precisely his interests in tracing large patterns in the evolutionary aspect of humankind's social and juridical structures led him to develop an encompassing anti-Semitic theory which he would make public on several occasions from then on. The first and most fundamental publication in that direction would be his essay *Le droit et la race*. It was published as an introduction to the *Pandectes belges* in 1891²³. Picard sought to connect the alleged "Jewish problem" with the so-called "social problem". He did so by outlining a world history of struggle between the Aryan and the Semitic race, all the while presenting the Jews as a race that parasites upon others, and emphasising that a racial conflict would be unavoidable when both races co-exist in the same area.

Picard distinguishes three stages in world history: First, the struggle between the Greeks and the Persians is regarded as the beginning of clash between two types of civilizations, the Persians being identified as representatives of the Semitic race:

Les guerres médiques mirent en présence, avec évidence le principe aryen et le principe sémitique. Le conflit demeure devant la postérité avec sa dominante: le maintien ou la destruction de l'indépendance hellénique, c'est-à-dire la continuation de la civilisation aryenne ou la substitution à celle-ci de la civilisation asiatique.

Second, the Punic wars are a second stage in the same conflict. The rise of Christianity is seen as a third and decisive factor in shaping civilization and creating societal structures. When discussing this third and still ongoing era, Picard's logic leads him to some far-fetched implications. He denies the Jewish roots of Jesus, claiming he was an Aryan, living in Judea. In support of his views, Picard noted that Christian doctrine had been largely rejected by the Jews, but had proven to be most influential and successful in the European, so-called "pagan" areas. These regions, he claimed, had been populated with Indo-Europeans, hence Aryans. Therefore, Picard argued, the decision to include the Old Testament into the canon was an aberration. Referring to books as *La France Juive*²⁴, Picard suggested some radical options to "cleanse" the civilization of his day. He listed solutions

23. E. PICARD, *Le droit et la race*, in E. PICARD – N. D'HOFFSCHMIDT (eds.), *Pandectes belges*, vol. 39, Brussels, 1891, pp. IX-LI.

24. É. DRUMONT, *La France juive*, Paris, 1886. The convert Edouard Drumont (1844-1917) was the founder of the *Ligue antisémite de France*. Picard had sent a copy of his *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme* to Drumont, with a handwritten note, reading: "À Monsieur Edouard Drumont qui plus précisément que tout autre a su en ce siècle donner au problème sémitique sa véritable importance et sa juste orientation". Cited in COPPEIN, *Edmond Picard* (n. 7), p. 317. On anti-Semitism in late 19th century France, see G. NORIEL, *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France (xix^e-xx^e siècle)*, Paris, 2007, pp. 207-283. Drumont's writings were influential on a larger European scale, on this, see the pages studying 'international anti-Semitism' in M. POORTHUIS – T. SALEMINK, *Een donkere spiegel. Nederlandse*

to the “Jewish problem”, and even proposed to exclude Jews from public functions and to limit their financial freedom.

La suppression de l'influence juive et, pour y parvenir, la destruction des fortunes juives, par une législation réformatrice de la Bourse, par la répression de la spéculation stérile, par l'organisation de pénalités sévères contre l'agiotage, par l'application impitoyable des responsabilités et du devoir de restitution contre ceux qui s'enrichissent aux dépens d'autrui et sans fournir aucun équivalent augmentant le patrimoine social commun. L'exclusion, aussi, des juifs des fonctions gouvernementales²⁵.

Picard was not the first to connect the Jewish people with wealth and power. Such views were not rare in late nineteenth-century Socialist milieus²⁶. They often drew upon Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Arnold Ruge (1802-1880) and their description of the Jews as an adequate illustration of capitalist exploitation²⁷. But unlike Marx, Picard will maintain the combination of economic and religious anti-Semitism – portraying the Jews as a deicide people, and entering into lengthy argumentations on the value of Jewish religious history and practices. Picard judged the “Catholic solution” of converting the Jews to Christianity to be useless, for it remained superficial²⁸. In the end, what made Picard's position particular was the attempt to embed his views in an overarching juridical perspective. However politically, religiously, and economically colored his anti-Semitism may have been, it was founded in a systematic connection of ethnological arguments and the Socialist doctrine of justice²⁹.

Picard returned to the subject one year later, with the publication of his *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme*³⁰. In this book he sketched a broader picture

katholieken over joden, 1870-2005. Tussen antisemitisme en erkenning, Nijmegen, 2006, pp. 56-59.

25. PICARD, *Le droit et la race* (n. 23), pp. xlix-l.

26. See K. WEISSMANN, *Der Nationale Sozialismus: Ideologie und Bewegung 1890-1933*, Munich, 1998, pp. 76ff.

27. See K. MARX – A. RUGE, *Zur Judenfrage*, in *Deutsch-Französischer Jahrbücher* 1844. On Picard's connection between the Jewish and the social problem, also see W. VAN ROOY, *Ideologie en ideologie-inconsistentie: De socialistische antisemit Edmond Picard (1836-1924)*, in *Tijdschrift voor diplomatie* 7/2 (1980-1981) 66-88, on p. 86. “One of the most fascinating individuals involved in the anti-Semitic movement, and, one who also contributed seriously to the misunderstanding concerning the alliance between anti-Semitism and socialism was Edmond Picard”.

28. PICARD, *Le droit et la race* (n. 23), p. xlii.

29. See COPPEIN, *Edmond Picard* (n. 7), pp. 304-306, esp. 304: “Zoals [Picard] ook later in *Le Droit pur* zou doen, gaf hij meteen aan het ras als de belangrijkste motor van de evolutie van de rechtstotaliteit te beschouwen: ‘Or, d'après notre conviction profonde, il n'est point, pour l'organisation et l'avancement du Droit, de facteur plus puissant et plus décisif que la race’”.

30. E. PICARD, *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme: La Bible et le Coran. Les hymnes védiques. L'art Arabe. Les Juifs au Maroc*, Brussels – Paris, 1892. Significantly, the book was published in a second edition after Picard's death, at the beginning of the Second World War,

of his world historical view, and again touched upon the value of the Old Testament and its irrelevance for the study of Christian origins. Picard was hardly the only one at that time to untie Christianity from its Jewish origins. Influential theologians such as Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) would later defend this position, with reference to Marcion. However, Picard's position was not the result of critical historical research, rather of emotions emerging during his Moroccan journey and of a tendency towards easy generalizations. This, combined with his juridical interests, led to the theory of the clash between the Aryan and the Semitic race. When applied to the origins of Christianity his *Synthèse de l'antisémitisme* contains passages such as:

Assurément aujourd'hui cette conception enfantine de l'histoire [the notion that Christianity has evolved out of Judaism] n'est plus admissible, et ce qui apparaît entre l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament, ce n'est plus un rapport de continuité, traditionnelle, mais un abîme profond, comme l'est toujours celui qui sépare les races³¹.

For Picard, the Semitic race did not only comprise the Jews but also the Muslim populations of Northern Africa. He went as far as to claim that not the New Testament, but the Quran was the real continuation of the Old Testament. Having reconfirmed the Aryan origins of Christ, Picard now also emphasised the role and the successes of the apostle Paul and his mission to the gentiles as a crucial element for his thesis. Paul's conflicts with the Jews demonstrated that the Christian Aryan religion was naturally to be more successful among Indo-Europeans:

Dès que la famille chrétienne commença à s'élargir, ce fut justement chez des gens non israélites, et partant non circoncis, que la foi nouvelle trouva le plus d'accès. Les obliger à se faire circoncire était impossible, car ils regardaient cette bizarre opération, transformation et vestige des sacrifices humains faits autrefois à Moloch, comme ridicule et déshonorante pour eux. [...] C'est à Corinthe que la vie apostolique de Paul atteignit son plus haut degré d'activité, toujours dans le sens d'un détachement du Judaïsme³².

Gradually, it appears, Picard was becoming aware of the fact that the study of the Ancient Near East was something of a hot topic among biblical scholars, certainly in France. He developed an ever increasing interest in studies published by authors such as Renan. Next to Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, his book *Saint Paul* (1864) had become a constant point of reference, allusion and citation³³. Also, Picard became a strong defender of the work of

in 1941, when Belgium fell under Nazi rule, and Picard's dubious heritage was picked up by the German occupants for propaganda uses.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

33. Picard's way of dealing with Renan's was quite selective, and he picked up in his same selective manner on Renan's views of the organization and foundation of the Nation

a less known French orientalist, Eugène Ledrain (1844-1910). Ledrain, himself impressed by Renan as well as by the harsh and authoritative ecclesiastical opposition against the latter, had been an Oratorian priest, but had resigned to become professor of Oriental Studies at the *École du Louvre* and conservator of the oriental collections of the Louvre Museum. Much under the influence of Renan and of French rationalist tendencies, Ledrain had initiated the project of a new French Bible translation on the basis of the Hebrew and Greek text. This particular translation was presented as an edition free of any religious influences and presented as *La Bible rationaliste*. Ledrain thought that “les juifs, et en général, les sémites, ne se sont guère élevés jusqu’à notre conception des rapports de l’univers avec la Divinité”³⁴. He began the first volume of his translation as follows:

Restent en face l’un de l’autre le catholicisme et la liberté. Mais, dans la question biblique, le premier fléchit déjà. Après avoir enseigné que, dans le texte, les mots eux-mêmes sont inspirés, il en est venu à n’admettre l’inspiration que pour la pensée, non pour les mots. Une opinion assez récente restreint l’inspiration aux idées religieuses et morales, de telle sorte qu’il ne peut y avoir, dans la Bible, ni une erreur de dogme, ni rien de contraire aux principes de mœurs³⁵.

In his “traduction indo-européenne” Ledrain attacked all of the above and tried to strip the biblical text from its supernatural and mythological proportions, in an early attempt at demythologization. Precisely his bible translation was perused by Picard as a source for his own speculative approaches, made public in a series of further publications, such as the 1893 essay *Contribution à la révision des origines du christianisme*. In 1896 Picard would publish his pamphlet *Le Sermon sur la montagne et le socialisme contemporain*, in which he went at great length – altering the original sequence of the text – to prove the congruence between contemporary Socialism and the Sermon on the Mount. In later years, he would continue to hold his views, even after his contested refusal to join a group of Belgian writers in their support of Émile Zola’s famous *J’accuse*³⁶, defending the Jewish captain Alfred Dreyfus³⁷. We now turn to the reactions on Picard’s exegetical endeavours from the Catholic theological milieus.

State, as rendered in the latter’s 1882 speech at the Sorbonne: *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*. On this issue, see the account given by COPPEIN, *Edmond Picard* (n. 7), pp. 324-338.

34. E. LEDRAIN, *Préface*, in *Histoire d’Israël*, vol. I, Paris, 1879, pp. II-III.

35. E. LEDRAIN, *La Bible: Traduction nouvelle d’après les textes Hébreu et Grec*, vol. 1, Paris, 1886, pp. VI-VII.

36. É. ZOLA, *J’accuse*, in *L’Aurore*, January 13, 1898, p. 1. On the issue of Dreyfusism in Belgium in the end of the 19th century, see the excellent study by J. STENGERS, *La Belgique: Un foyer de dreyfusisme*, in M. DENIS – M. LAGRÉE – J.-Y. VELLARD (eds.), *L’affaire Dreyfus et l’opinion publique en France et à l’étranger*, Rennes, 1995, 273-290.

37. Picard would defend his own views in the socialist journal *Le Peuple* on January 27, 1898; and in the same year he would publish a series of nineteen articles in the same

ALBIN VAN HOONACKER (1857-1933)

Although Edmond Picard never professed any genuine anti-religious attitude as was often found both in the right wing of the Liberal Party and in some circles of the Socialist Party³⁸ his environment did not quite connect him with the altogether different milieu of Louvain's Faculty of Theology. Also, Picard did maintain a sense of anti-clericalism. That said, it should immediately be made clear that the faculty itself was not free of anti-Semitic sentiments either³⁹. Certainly after the Damascus-incident of 1840⁴⁰, there appeared a series of articles in the Liège *Journal historique et littéraire*⁴¹ by the Louvain theologian and later bishop of Bruges Jean-Baptiste Malou (1809-1864). Malou illustrated the historical foundations of the antagonism between Jews and Christians, underlining that Christians never intended to harm the Jews, but that the latter are instructed by the Talmud to attack Christians⁴². Professors such as Jan-Theodoor Beelen (1807-1884) took an opposite stance and stressed the significance of the study of Judaism in Christian theology. But, the period that is of interest to us is a later one. Beelen had given biblical exegesis a strong philological orientation and established the Louvain Orientalist School. This tendency faltered somewhat after his retirement in 1875. In the 1880s the only theologian teaching and studying biblical exegesis was Thomas-Joseph Lamy (1827-1907)⁴³, who severely attacked biblical-criticism, describing it as "un travail de démolition rationaliste"⁴⁴. Without much exaggeration, Lamy can be described as a representative of the traditional Catholic point of view, who

journal, entitled *L'Antisémitisme scientifique et humanitaire*. These articles were also published separately in the volume E. PICARD, *L'Aryano-Sémitisme*, Brussels, 1898.

38. Anticlerical tendencies were certainly and openly present, and peaked somewhat as a result of the school struggle in the late 1870s. See J. LORY, *La résistance des catholiques belges à la "loi de malheur"*, 1879-1884, in *Revue du Nord* 67 (1985) 729-747.

39. A more general picture of late 19th-century Catholic anti-Semitism in Belgium is offered in L. SAERENS, *De houding van de Belgische katholieken tegenover de joden*, in *Trajecta. Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van het katholieke leven in de Nederlanden* 15 (2006) 76-93.

40. J. FRANKEL, *The Damascus Affaire: Ritual Murder, Politics, and the Jews in 1840*, Cambridge, 1997. On February 5, 1840, the Italian Capucine friar Tommaso had been kidnapped and murdered. Soon, rumours spread that this was a ritual murder committed by Jews, and shortly thereafter seven Jews were arrested and they confessed under torture.

41. See J.-B. MALOU, *Doctrine des juifs sur le mal qu'il peuvent faire aux chrétiens*, in *Journal historique et littéraire* 8 (1841-1842) 445-458.

42. On this episode, see L. KENIS, *Tussen filologie en polemieek: Het jodendom in publicaties van Leuvense theologen in de negentiende eeuw*, in *Trajecta* 15 (2006) 49-60.

43. On Lamy, see P. LADEUZE, *Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Mgr Lamy*, in *Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain* 72 (1908) CXXXI-CLIX. Also see L. KENIS, *De Theologische faculteit te Leuven in de negentiende eeuw 1834-1889* (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Letteren, 54/143), Brussels, 1992, pp. XXX.

44. T.-J. LAMY, *Jésus Christ devant la critique*, in *Revue Générale* 52 (1890) 707-732, esp. p. 711.

endorsed the policies expressed in the *Syllabus errorum*. This becomes quite clear from his negative reception of several of Renan's books, whom he had personally known during his study period at the Paris *Bibliothèque Nationale*⁴⁵. As the only Belgian theologian to devote serious attention to the book, Lamy's *Examen critique de la Vie de Jésus de Renan* is grafted on the principles of a dogmatic approach of Scripture and left little room for a modern approach to biblical exegesis⁴⁶. In fact, it would take a young priest from the diocese of Bruges, Albin Van Hoonacker⁴⁷, to pick up the threads left by Beelen and to critically challenge Picard's statements on the value of the Old Testament.

Van Hoonacker came from a Catholic family of Bruges. After studying Latin and Greek at the Collège Saint Louis in his hometown, he entered the Minor Seminary at Roulers to study philosophy. He received his theological formation at the Major Seminary of the diocese of Bruges. On December 18, 1880, Van Hoonacker was ordained to the priesthood⁴⁸. Soon thereafter the bishop of Bruges, Mgr. Jean-Joseph Faict (1813-1894), well known for openly criticizing all forms of Roman Catholic traditionalism during Vatican I, sent Van Hoonacker to Louvain to prepare a doctoral dissertation in fundamental theology under the direction of Prof. Antoine Dupont (1836-1917)⁴⁹. The topic was the doctrine of creation. Van Hoonacker successfully defended his dissertation in July 1886. After a short period of parish work at Courtrai he was sent back to Louvain, to become subregent of the Holy Spirit College, and to improve his knowledge of Oriental languages. Van Hoonacker became well versed in Hebrew, Syriac and Arab. In these years he also took an interest in studying the role of historical criticism in Catholic exegesis, and started distinguishing between apologetics and biblical criticism. In one of his first studies Van Hoonacker dealt with methodology, positioning sound Catholic biblical criticism in between

45. L. DE LA VALLÉE POUSSIN, *Notice sur Thomas-Joseph Lamy*, in *Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain* 72 (1908) CXXXIII. See also the statement by J. COPPENS, in his *Son Excellence Mgr Paulin Ladeuze: Notice biographique*, in *Annuaire Nuntia Lovanien-sia* 10 (1954-1955) 200-201: "Lamy n'avait pas été dénué de science ni de talent, mais il s'était en quelque sorte arrêté à la réfutation d'Ernest Renan. S'obstinant à se placer à un point de vue principalement polémique et apologétique, il avait perdu de vue la tâche d'un professeur d'université".

46. T.-J. LAMY, *Examen critique de la Vie de Jésus de M. Ernest Renan*, Brussels, 1863. This is a revised version of his commentary published as T.-J. LAMY, *La Vie de Jésus par M. Ernest Renan*, in *Revue Catholique* 21 (1863) 470-485. Lamy's commentary has recently been studied by W. DE PRIL, *La Vie de Jésus d'Ernest Renan: Analyse comparative de la réception catholique et protestante en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas*, in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 104 (2009) 448-482.

47. On Van Hoonacker, see K. SCHELKENS, *Albin Van Hoonacker*, in *Bio-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 29, Nordhausen, 2008, cols. 1485-1491.

48. ADB: Biographical dossier Van Hoonacker

49. See H. JACOBS, *De roermondenaar Antoine Dupont, Professor te Leuven 1836-1917*, in *Publications de la Société historique et archéologique dans le Limbourg* 90-91 (1954-1955) 227-248.

apologetic and traditionalist bible approaches and rationalism⁵⁰. In this way, he distanced himself somewhat from the Leuven exegete Lamy. As a result, Van Hoonacker also became a talented biblical critic. He developed an interest in the Pentateuch and the Minor prophets, which would eventually become his main expertise. Towards the end of the 1880 Van Hoonacker and Picard started spreading their publications in the field of biblical studies. Picard, remaining an amateur-scholar, did so in *La Réforme* – the periodical of the progressive liberals – and in *L'Art Moderne*. Van Hoonacker published articles in *Le Muséon* – a periodical founded by Charles-Joseph de Harlez (1832-1899). He had not only read the French scholarship of his time, but could just as well enter into debate with Protestant Orientalist scholars as Johann Gustav Stickel (1805-1896) at the University of Jena and Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891) at Leiden University.

On the occasion of the appearance of the fifth volume of Ledrain's *Bible rationaliste* (1889) dealing with *Les prophètes*⁵¹, Picard published a long article praising Ledrain's non-clerical approach of historiography. Picking up on this thread, Picard took great effort in underlining the liberty of the prophets *vis-à-vis* the Jewish people and its cult, and re-defined their stance in terms of race and politics. Against the background of his own peculiar views on world history as an antagonist history, Picard opposed the Judaic "stagnated civilization" – pointing to the cultic massacre of children for Jahweh⁵² – to that of the "Persian-Aryan" Assyrians. In an inspired tour de force, he went as far as to identifying the Jahweh with Baal-Moloch, and then claimed, "Baal-Moloch, jusque-là le Jéhovah régulier, savoure tranquillement ses rations périodiques de petits enfants, absolument comme on le vit longtemps à Carthage, et rassasie ses regards du spectacle excitant des orgies sémitiques". Subsequently, he argued that Amos (and later on also Isaiah and Jeremiah) turned against the Jews for their lack of civilization, thus installing a split between the prophets and the Jewish people, which allowed him to somehow "rehabilitate" the prophets as non-Semitic. The prophets, Picard concluded, were quite right in attacking Jewish cult and cannot be counted among the Semite populations, but are put under the Aryan camp, linked to the Assyrian civilization⁵³. The spreading of such disinformation soon prompted the reaction of the Catholic newspaper

50. A. VAN HOONACKER, *La critique biblique et l'apologétique*, Louvain, 1889, in which he repeated the loyal yet critical position he had already presented in his earlier articles, entitled *Coup d'œil sur la critique biblique rationaliste*, in *Muséon* 7/1 (1888) 2-9; and *La critique biblique et l'apologétique*, in *Muséon* 8 (1898) 394-398.

51. E. LEDRAIN, *La Bible*, vol. 5, Paris, 1889. See a.o. on p. 5, where Ledrain claims that: "Les gens des tribus s'en allaient donc voir les prostituées saintes ... Les filles d'Israël se livraient même, paraît-il, à ceux de leur nation et aux étrangers".

52. E. PICARD, *Les prophètes*, in *La Réforme*, July 1889, pp. 12-27.

53. *Ibid.*: "L'initiative des prophètes concorde avec l'apparition sur la scène judaïque des Assyriens. Au contact d'une civilisation plus raffinée, l'horreur du culte meurtrier avait envahi ces cœurs d'élite connus sous le nom de prophètes". This reveals something of the

Journal de Bruxelles. In search for someone to counter Picard's allegations, the editorial board soon realized that Lamy was not quite suitable. Via connections in Bruges⁵⁴ the board was directed to another candidate, Van Hoonacker, not yet a professor at that time. In a full page *Supplément* to the Sunday issue of *Journal de Bruxelles* of July 7, 1889, the young doctor would present his peers and readers with the problematic character of Picard's writings, which were described in the front page editorial as a piece of "impressionisme marocain"⁵⁵. Thus the earliest polemic with Picard's anti-Semitic biblical reading found its way to the public. In his anonymous refutation, Van Hoonacker took an interesting and rather peculiar approach for a Catholic biblical scholar of his age: from the very outset he chose to refute Picard's positions from the viewpoint of the French rationalist literature which Picard claimed to be his source. Van Hoonacker discussed at length the discordance between Picard's views and the positions of Renan, Gustave Tridon (1841-1871)⁵⁶, Abraham Kuenen and Julius Wellhausen. He demonstrated his own expertise in the field of prophetic history, constantly attacking the lack of scientific quality of Picard's writings:

La Réforme s'étonne que les cléricaux ne soufflent mot; je le crois bien, les cléricaux, non plus que les rationalistes, ne connaissent rien de cette fantasmagorie imaginée de toutes pièces par les savants de la Réforme. M. Picard s'extasie devant la tactique de ces grands hommes, les prophètes du VIII^e siècle; cette tactique, dit-il, est parfaite d'adresse et de diplomatie. M. Picard a-t-il lu une page d'Amos ou d'Osée? S'il l'a fait, il aura constaté que ces grands hommes supposent comme la seule religion légitime le culte du Jéhovah qu'ils

nature of Picard's brand of anti-Semitism, which is never purely racial or ethnological. He admits to the possibility that the prophets, of Judaic descent, being exiled, join the ranks of the Persian civilization, and oppose themselves to the Jewish civilization.

54. It should be noted that various circles of liberal Catholics were active at the time in Bruges. Among them, one finds the Lawyer Maurice Dullaert (1865-1940) who – shortly after Van Hoonacker – would also attack Picard's writings. Dullaert, who had close contacts with the Bruges priest and rector of the Bruges beguinage, Hector Hoornaert (1851-1921), would be among those seeking literary renewal, among others via publications in *Le Magasin Littéraire et Scientifique*. A few years after Van Hoonacker, Dullaert openly attacked Picard's anti-Semitism, in his brochure *L'antisémitisme de M. Edmond Picard*, Gent, 1892, the Bruges Lawyer takes, more than Van Hoonacker, a theological stance pointing to the fact that Picard's opinions imply a theory of polygenism (*i.e.* the denial of the "fact" that all humanity comes from one single couple: Adam and Eve. He himself defended a critical version of monogenism. Also, Dullaert challenged the logical consistency of Picard's views: "La thèse de M. Picard a ceci de très particulier que, si elle confère à ses adversaires le droit de la combattre, elle prive ses champions de la possibilité logique de la défendre". On Dullaert, see A. VAN DEN ABBEELE, *De Balie van Brugge: Geschiedenis van de Orde van advocaten in het gerechtelijk arrondissement Brugge*, Bruges, 2009, p. 168.

55. He was clearly alluding to the *El Moghreb al-Aksa* series in *L'Art Moderne*.

56. Gustave Tridon, who died in 1871, had written an anti-Semitic pamphlet entitled *Le Molochisme Juif: Études critiques et Philosophiques*, which had been posthumously published in 1884. This had been quickly picked up by authors such as Drumont and Picard for use within their own writings and argumentations.

prêchent. Ces prophètes ne cessent de répéter que les Israélites abandonnent Jéhovah pour se prostituer au culte des divinités étrangères⁵⁷.

He criticised Picard for his lack of chronological precision and inverted his argument by showing that it was not the Jews, but rather the Assyrians who for many generations cultivated cruel cultic habits⁵⁸. After listing a series of examples, Van Hoonacker noted:

Voilà, mon cher monsieur Picard, l'influence des Assyriens sur les idées religieuses et le culte des Hébreux. L'apparition des Assyriens sur la scène judaïque provoque une recrudescence violente des coutumes monstrueuses qu'autrefois l'exemple des Phéniciens et d'autres nations voisines avaient introduites en Israël, au mépris de la loi et malgré les menaces des prophètes de Jéhovah.

Van Hoonacker ended his attack by repeating that he had been able to refute Picard simply by sticking to a rationalist approach of the Bible⁵⁹. In general, Van Hoonacker's exposé is sharp and quite polemic⁶⁰, but it remains far from a traditionalist or apologetic exegetical position. Significantly, Van Hoonacker did not once refer to the authority of the Church, nor did he make the biblical literature part of divine revelation. Bearing in mind that he deliberately stayed away from doctrinal issues, one is surprised by Picard's reaction in a letter, dated July 9 1889, and published in *Réforme*:

Je n'essaierai pas de répondre à votre docteur en choses saintes. Pour discuter utilement il faut au moins quelques points de départ communs. Or, il n'en est pas, dans la science, entre ceux qui ne suivent que la raison et ceux qui se prosternent devant la révélation. [...] Mes autorités ne sont pas les siennes: je consulte des sources qu'il brûlerait, s'il pouvait, et leurs auteurs aussi. Sa Bible n'est pas la mienne, je n'admets que la traduction de Ledrain, qui à elle seule est une démolition des singulières naïvetés que la foi chrétienne a introduites dans ce livre arabe, si contraire à notre civilisation.

Picard cites a letter from Ledrain to him, and then repeated his perspective on the complex relationship between the Old and the New Testament.

57. A. VAN HOONACKER, *Supplément au Journal de Bruxelles*, 7 July 1889.

58. His major source was the work of the French archaeologist and Assyriologist François LENORMANT (1837-1883), *Histoire des peuples de l'Orient*, vol. VI: *Civilisation, religion et monuments de l'Assyrie et de la Chaldée*, p. 95.

59. VAN HOONACKER, *Supplément au Journal de Bruxelles*, 7 July 1889 (n. 57): "Nous nous arrêtons. Nous avons pu, pour faire justice des allégations gratuites de M. Picard, nous en tenir en général au point de vue de la critique rationaliste elle-même. Aussi-bien, il s'agissait seulement, comme nous l'avons dit en commençant, de montrer le vide de ces tirades sonores".

60. Van Hoonacker may have learned some from the director of his doctorate, Dupont, who was quite known for his sharp polemic attitude. See KENIS, *De Theologische faculteit* (n. 42), pp. 466-467.

Far more relevant is that Picard's reaction tends to alter the tone of the polemic, causing it to shift from a discussion on methodology to an ideological debate, using *ad hominem* arguments⁶¹. On July 12, Van Hoonacker offers a short reply, explaining that he had explicitly abstained from all references to the revealed character of the scriptures only to trigger yet another harsh, but this time quite elaborate reaction from the side of Picard in the *Journal de Bruxelles* of July 17, 1889. By that time, both authors had dug themselves deep into their trenches, and no real dialogue is still possible. Picard stressed once again the value of the writings of Tridon and of Ledrain's approach to biblical criticism, and emphasised yet one more time the importance of the Vedantic literature as the cradle of Indo-European psychology and civilization. As a result, Van Hoonacker returned to his position and responded again in a striking non-theological way. He remained on the level of history and presented himself as an historian. Most remarkably, for a Catholic biblical scholar, no use is made of theological or ecclesiastical arguments. Only in the last paragraph of his response did Van Hoonacker turn political, all the while retaining full confidence in historical methodology:

Il n'est pas impossible que, fatigué des banqueroutes répétées du libéralisme, le monde ne redevienne encore une fois juif et chrétien. C'est alors surtout qu'il sera bon que l'histoire désintéressée de ces grandes choses ait été faite, car la période des études impartiales sur le passé de l'humanité ne sera peut-être plus bien longue. Le goût de l'histoire est le plus aristocratique des goûts, il court des dangers. [...] Et maintenant que M. Picard, que nous pouvons admirer au Palais et même ailleurs, nous laisse tranquille sur le terrain de l'histoire: "ce sera pour lui très sage et très réconfortant pour nous"⁶².

And still the battle was not fought. On July 19, Picard reacted with another letter, demanding to know the name of his adversary. Also, he mocked the attitude of a Catholic theologian who did not dare to make himself known, while at the same time making constant references to the "impious Renan". Now Van Hoonacker was forced to come out in the open. He decidedly entered the theological level and revealed his position

61. E. PICARD, *Lettre à l'éditeur du Journal de Bruxelles*, in *La Réforme*, 12 July 1889: "À la grande douleur des chrétiens, les origines arabes de leur belle religion ont été, en ce siècle, scrutées et débattues avec une rigueur scientifique impitoyable. Le vrai commence à transparaître et à se répandre. Ni la colère des uns ni la résignation des autres n'arrêtent cette évolution. De plus en plus l'Ancien Testament se détache de nous pour retourner au sémitisme, son légitime propriétaire, et peu à peu les beaux chants traditionnels du Rig-Veda aryen se révèlent comme la seule expression antique de la race dont les Européens sont issus. [...] J'ai à peine la prétention d'aider par quelques nouveaux aperçus, consciencieusement médités, à cette transformation qui irrite et scandalise votre docteur au point qu'il oublie la décence obligatoire entre adversaires loyaux. Je le lui pardonne en Jésus-Christ, l'aryen par excellence et le maître à imiter assurément en bien des choses".

62. A. VAN HOONACKER, *Maître Picard et les prophètes*, in *Journal de Bruxelles*, 17 July 1889.

– tantamount to the entire modernist debate – regarding the importance of reconciling scientific methodology with the tradition of Christian faith. Over against the a-religious portrait of Christ as the Aryan role model, Van Hoonacker stated that Christianity is simultaneously a science and an historical fact. Christ, he illustrated, is either a vulgar imposter or the center of creation. He then went on declaring the status of theology as a science, claiming a central position for it within the world of science:

La science est impossible, et elle est stérile, sans la tradition. La science de la religion chrétienne est plus vaste que celle du droit et que toutes les autres sciences parce qu'elle est la science maîtresse. Pour la posséder à fond il faut de longues années d'études austères et désintéressées, sans dilettantisme. Nous n'en avons pas la prétention d'en être maître, mais nous avons la certitude absolue de son éternelle royauté. Au poste de combat qu'il a plu à la Providence de nous assigner, nous croyons remplir un devoir vulgaire en ne perdant aucune occasion pour démontrer la divine supériorité du christianisme et la terrestre supériorité de "bons docteurs" tels que nous, contre l'incroyance. C'est ainsi que nous comprenons notre apostolat⁶³.

The polemic ended with an ideological clash, that was not without consequences for the priest from Bruges. At a time when Van Hoonacker was still drafting his final response, published in *Journal de Bruxelles* on July 22, his doings had been closely followed by some well-placed Belgian Catholics. The newly appointed rector of the Louvain Catholic University, Jean-Baptiste Abbeloos (1936-1906), who was trained as an orientalist scholar in the tradition of Beelen⁶⁴ and was once named as a candidate to succeed the latter, paid particular attention to the incident⁶⁵. Much in line with the editorial board of *Journal de Bruxelles*, Abbeloos was aware of the attacks on the foundations of Christian faith from several sides, as well as of the lack of expertise in the field of biblical criticism and Oriental studies at the Faculty of Theology. He undertook swift action, and already on July 20, 1889, he wrote to Cardinal Pierre Lambert Goossens (1827-1906) and the Belgian bishops, addressing several propositions on the issue of staff changes at the University. The longer part of that letter dealt with the Theological Faculty and the state of biblical scholarship within it. With Lamy as the sole exegete in mind, he wrote:

Au cours des dernières années le mouvement scientifique, en créant de nouveaux besoins, nous a mis en présence d'une lacune profonde dans l'enseignement

63. A. VAN HOONACKER, *Maître Picard et les prophètes*, in *Journal de Bruxelles*, 22 July 1889.

64. Abbeloos had been proposed as a possible successor to Beelen, but was never appointed, due to the resistance of the Liège bishop De Montpellier. See KENIS, *De Theologische faculteit* (n. 42), pp. 415-416.

65. A. CAUCHIE, *Abbeloos (Jean-Baptiste)*, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, vol. I, Paris, 1912, 38-39.

théologique. Les études historiques, philologiques, et religieuses sur les anciens peuples de l'Orient se sont portées sur la littérature sacrée de l'Ancien Testament et sur les institutions du peuple hébreu. Les attaques incessantes et vigoureuses dirigées contre l'Église avec des armes nouvelles trouvent malheureusement, en Belgique comme ailleurs, des échos de plus en plus inquiétantes, et sans contrepartie suffisantes; elles menacent de la façon la plus directe les fondements traditionnels de la foi religieuse⁶⁶.

Abbeloos proposed to establish a new chair at the Faculty for teaching “l’histoire critique du peuple hébreu”, the relationships between the Jewish people and its neighboring civilizations, and its religious institutions. The course would be mandatory for students in theology. At the end of his proposal he wrote: “je propose de le confier à Mr. le Docteur Van Hoonacker, qui s’est signalé déjà par plusieurs travaux de critique biblique de grande valeur”. Ten days later, the Belgian bishops met and unanimously accepted the proposal⁶⁷. As of the next academic year, Van Hoonacker would hold the chair of “Histoire critique de l’Ancien Testament”, and would also teach courses of Hebrew, Syriac, and Arab at the Faculty⁶⁸. In the years to come, he would turn out to be a key personality in the evolution of the Faculty, together with colleagues such as Paulin Ladeuze (1870-1940). In later years, Van Hoonacker debated openly with and kept a personal correspondence with Catholic modernist protagonists, such as Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938)⁶⁹ and the early Alfred Loisy (1857-1940)⁷⁰. In 1901, much to his own surprise, he was appointed among the first consulters of the Pontifical Biblical Commission⁷¹. As many others of his generation, Van Hoonacker would suffer personally under the modernist crisis. First, when the work of one of his most brilliant students, Hendrik A. Poels (1868-1948), would be attacked and put under suspicion due to the actions of the Haarlem bishop Caspar Joseph Bottemanne (1823-1903) and an intransigent Belgian Jesuit, Alphonse Delattre⁷². Later on,

66. AAM: Provincialia 19: Letter from J.-B. Abbeloos to the archbishop Goossens, July 20 1889.

67. AAM: Provincialia 19: Réunion de NN.SS. les évêques, 29-30 July 1889: “M. Van Hoonacker est nommé professeur extra-ordinaire de la faculté de théologie”.

68. ADB: Notice de la *Patrie*, August 1889: “dans leur réunion tenue lundi dernier, NN. SS. les évêques ont confié au jeune et savant ecclésiastique la chaire de critique biblique. Il s’agit pour M. Van Hoonacker d’inaugurer un enseignement spécial, pour ainsi dire nouveau, en Belgique”.

69. On Lagrange, see B. MONTAGNES, *Marie-Joseph Lagrange: Une biographie critique*, Paris, 2005. On the later quarrels between Lagrange and Delattre, see pp. 106-112.

70. ATF: Archive Van Hoonacker, correspondence. Also see A. VAN HOONACKER’s public *Lettre au R.P. Lagrange*, in *Revue biblique internationale* 4 (1895) 186-192.

71. On the establishment of the Biblical Commission, see A. VANHOYE, *Passé et présent de la Commission biblique*, in *Gregorianum* 74 (1993) 261-275.

72. On the quarrel between Delattre and Poels, also see G.P. FOGARTY, *Biblical Scholarship at the Catholic University of America*, in *The Catholic Historical Review* (1989) 628ff. Later on Poels’ own defense was made public in an edition by F. NEIRYNCK – H.A. POELS

Van Hoonacker would be warned by Lagrange of the imminent risk that his work be put on the Index. Thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Joseph-Désiré Mercier (1851-1926) this was eventually avoided⁷³. Here again, Delattre's critical reviews of Van Hoonacker's *Les Douze prophètes* played a major role⁷⁴.

ALPHONSE J. DELATTRE (1841-1928)

The Belgian Jesuit father Delattre⁷⁵ was among those behind the attacks on the "Louvain School" of exegesis in the beginning of the twentieth century⁷⁶. Delattre, ordained priest on September 8, 1876, studied in Beyrouth from 1886 until 1888 and became well versed in biblical studies

(eds.), *A Vindication of My Honor* (Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia, 25), Louvain, 1982. Furthermore, it should be stated that Poels, in a noted article on *De belangrijkheid der geschiedenis van 't Oude Israël* published in the periodical *De Katholiek* on January 10, 1898, had defended the same view as his Louvain professor Van Hoonacker, stressing the continuity between the Old and the New Testament. Cf. POORTHUIS – SALEMINK, *Een donkere spiegel* (n. 24), pp. 146-148.

73. See Van Hoonacker's correspondence with Lagrange in ATF: Archive Van Hoonacker. Also see the articles by F. NEIRYNCK, *A. van Hoonacker et l'Index*, in *ETL* 57 (1981) 293-297 and J. LUST, *A Letter from M.J. Lagrange to A. van Hoonacker*, in *ETL* 59 (1983) 331-332.

74. A.J. DELATTRE, *Un peu d'exégèse: À propos d'un nouveau commentaire des Douze prophètes*, Liège, 1909, 295 p. In this work, Delattre viciously attacked Van Hoonacker's exegetical approaches, claiming that they are not in line with the hierarchy's expectations toward Catholic biblical scholarship, and lack doctrinal content and value. Delattre finally condemns VAN HOONACKER's book *Les Douze petits prophètes traduits et commentés*, Paris, 1908, as an example of modernist biblical criticism. Yet, even when fully completed, Delattre's book was never published, since it had been barred by the Jesuit's internal censure procedures. See the correspondence on this in ABSE: Papers Arthur Vermeersch. In ARSI: Prov. Belgica 1910-1919. Scriptores. Sectio II: P.A. Delattre contra R.D. Van Hoonacker, one also finds a folder containing correspondence and documents regarding this issue. In the wake of this quarrel, Van Hoonacker also decided not to publish a manuscript he had prepared on the veracity of biblical narratives. This text would be published posthumously by J. COPPENS as *Quelques notes sur Absolute und relative Wahrheit in der heiligen Schrift: Une contribution inédite du chanoine Albin van Hoonacker à la Question Biblique* (1909), in *ETL* 18 (1941) 201-336. More background information is given in L. COURTOIS, *Paulin Ladeuze (1870-1940): Jeunesse et formation (1870-1898); vie et pensée d'un exégète catholique au temps du modernisme (1898-1914)*, 5 vol., Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998, vol. IV, pp. 752-754.

75. A short biographical notice is given in É DE MOREAU, *Delattre, Alphonse*, in *Biographie Nationale*, Vol. XXIX, Brussels, 1977, col. 533. The best study on Delattre available up to the present is the one by L. COURTOIS, *Les jésuites belges et la crise moderniste (1903-1914): Le cas du père Alphonse Delattre*, in A. DENEFF – X. ROUSSEAU (eds.), *Quatre siècles de présence jésuite à Bruxelles*, Brussel – Leuven, 2012, 577-589.

76. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Delattre highly valued the works of the aforementioned Louvain exegete Beelen. See the rather hagiographical but nevertheless interesting biographical overview in V. DUBAR, *Le révérend père Alphonse Delattre s.j. (1841-1928): Savant polémiste*, s.l., 1928, pp. 34-34.

and Assyriology. He specialized in Old Testament exegesis and published several works on Chaldean and Persian history⁷⁷, yet never quite accepted the methods applied by scholars such as Van Hoonacker. Upon his return to Belgium he was appointed professor of exegesis at the Louvain Jesuit College, and just as Van Hoonacker, figured among the first generation of consultants to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. The two Louvain exegetes were all but allies. On the contrary, Delattre thought it was a primordial task for Catholic exegesis to safeguard revealed doctrinal truths, and refused to question these as a result of historical criticism. Both his exegetical and other writings⁷⁸ bear the mark of Catholic apologetics. Delattre – defending the Roman school in the tradition of Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816-1886) – would openly attack several Catholic exegetes for being led astray into Liberalism, Socialism, Modernism and Americanism, ... or even “Harnackism”⁷⁹. He caused great difficulties to Poels⁸⁰ and he also attacked the position of Ladeuze, Van Hoonacker’s colleague in the field of New Testament studies⁸¹. Known as a polemicist writing dozens of “conservative” pamphlets, Delattre entered into a dispute with Ladeuze on the orthodoxy of the exegetical methodology as developed and applied by Lagrange⁸². As a reaction to Lagrange’s work on the historical method in Catholic exegesis⁸³, Delattre published his controversial book *Autour de la question biblique* (1904), in which he accused Lagrange of being a “modernist” in the tradition of the founder of the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, Mgr. Maurice d’Hulst (1841-1896)⁸⁴, and of neglecting the

77. For more biographical information on Delattre, see *ibid.* See for instance A.J. DELATTRE, *Les Chaldéens jusqu’à la formation de l’empire de Nabuchodonosor*, Paris, 1877; *Le peuple et l’empire des Mèdes jusqu’à la fin du règne de Cyaxare*, Brussels, 1883; and *Coup d’œil sur la civilisation Assyrio-Babylonienne*, Louvain, 1900.

78. See for instance his attack on “Americanism” in A.J. DELATTRE, *Un catholicisme américain*, Namur, 1898, and a repeated version of it in his article *Encore l’Américanisme: Une planche de salut*, in the Jesuit periodical *Études* 76 (1898) 535.

79. See A.J. DELATTRE’s quite aggressive and antiprotestant stance in his *Préludes d’une refutation de l’Harnackisme*, Brussels, 1908.

80. Delattre cites and attacks H.A. POELS’s *Critiek en Traditie, of de Bijbel voor de Roomschen*, Antwerp, 1899, on several occasions in his vast attack on Lagrange’s “modernist methodology”. See A.J. DELATTRE, *Autour de la Question biblique: Une nouvelle école d’exégèse et les autorités qu’elle invoque*, Liège, 1904, pp. 175-181.

81. On Ladeuze and his particular role and position in the modernist crisis, see the unpublished doctoral dissertation by COURTOIS, *Paulin Ladeuze (1870-1940)* (n. 74).

82. L. COURTOIS, *Paulin Ladeuze (1870-1940): Parcours d’un exégète progressiste de l’Université de Louvain au cours de la crise moderniste (1898-1909)*, in *Lettre d’information sur l’histoire des Universités* 5/1 (1999) 9-15.

83. M.-J. LAGRANGE, *La méthode historique, surtout à propos de l’Ancien Testament*, Paris, 1903.

84. M. D’HULST’s article *La question biblique*, in *Le Correspondant* 134 (1893) 201-251, had been one of the factors that had triggered the promulgation of *Providentissimus Deus*. See C. THEOBALD, *La Question biblique: De la doctrine de Providentissimus Deus à la reception de l’exégèse historico-critique par Divino Afflante Spiritu*, in B. SESBOÜÉ – C. THEOBALD (eds.), *La parole du salut* (Histoire des dogmes, 4), Paris, 1996, 345-382.

doctrinal demands set forth in *Providentissimus Deus*⁸⁵. Delattre's attacks prefigure the official positions to be taken by Pius XI in *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili*⁸⁶.

The differences between the Louvain professors and Delattre notwithstanding, they also had something in common: Some years after Van Hoonacker's polemics with Picard, Delattre in turn attacked Picard's historiographical and biblical essays.

Picard's *Contribution à la révision des origines du christianisme* of 1893⁸⁷, prompted a reaction from Delattre in a brochure *Un essai biblique de M. Edmond Picard*, published a year later. Delattre takes up a double angle in his reaction: he attacked, like Van Hoonacker, the very foundations of Picard's theories, with a particularly large part devoted to the lack of quality and precision in Ledrain's Bible translation. Stipulating that "les savants, même les plus hétérodoxes la dédaignent profondément; elle n'existe pas pour eux", he mocked the fact that Picard was unable to read Hebrew and was relying on a worthless source⁸⁸. The second part of his essay dealt with the issue of Picard's analysis of the child sacrifice, and the cult of Baal-Moloch. Here too, Delattre stayed quite close to the position of Van Hoonacker and offered a detailed criticism, equally attacking the work of Tridon. Only in the final clauses did he clearly distance himself from Van Hoonacker's position in an open attack on "rationalist" exegesis⁸⁹. In his entire approach, Delattre adopted the same apologetic methodology he used his fellow Catholic exegetes: He refused to enter into a broad discussion of the value of Picard's work as a whole, but rather discussed and attacked bits and parts of the writings of his opponents.

85. DELATTRE, *Autour de la Question biblique* (n. 80). For instance, on p. 210, one finds accusations towards Lagrange sounding: "Par malheur, l'écrivain conçoit l'Écriture comme un ensemble d'écrits remplis d'erreurs qu'il appelle matérielles, mais que les livres inspirés sont censés offrir sous la même rubrique que la vérité pure. L'idée qu'il donne de l'histoire biblique primordiale est digne seulement de l'Écriture interprétée selon la norme du bœuf volant". See also p. 344: "Je n'aurai pas eu le temps de faire observer que tout le fait des cent exégètes tant loués dans l'Encyclique *Providentissimus Deus*, est reprouvée par le R.P. Lagrange en vertu d'un principe qu'il prétend tirer de cette même encyclique!". More information on the methodological and doctrinal disputes of the era are found in C. THEOBALD, *L'exégèse catholique au moment de la crise moderniste*, in C. SAVART – J.N. ALETTI (eds.), *Le monde contemporain et la Bible* (Bible de tous les temps), Paris, 1985, 387-439.

86. S. CONGREGATIO SACRAE ROMANAE ET UNIVERSALIS INQUISITIONIS, *Decretum Lamentabili quo sub 65 propositionibus reprobantur et proscribuntur praecipui errores reformismi seu modernismi*, in ASS 40 (1907) 470-478.

87. E. PICARD, *Contribution à la révision des origines du christianisme*, Brussels, 1893.

88. A.J. DELATTRE, *Un essai biblique de M. Edmond Picard*, Brussels, 1894.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 45: "On opposera les théories rationalistes. Elles ne m'ont jamais effrayé, et j'en ai fait assez sentir la faiblesse. Mais nous ne pouvons les réfuter toutes à propos d'une brochure aussi chétive que la 'Contribution' dont nous nous sommes peut-être déjà trop occupé".

His attacks did not end here. Picard had called him “un redoutable raseur”⁹⁰. Delattre took on his adversary in a much more elaborate way, refuting Picard’s opinions in a book of about two hundred and fifty pages⁹¹. Delattre repeated his criticism and used his vast knowledge of Assyriology and Hebrew, but this time, he went beyond a mere discussion of facts, sources and methodological differences. As he would later do with Lagrange, he now insisted that Picard was not just a lost case as an exegete, but also an heretic from the viewpoint of Christian doctrine.

Delattre used various tactics. He attacked, as he had done before, the foundations of Picard’s theory, but also called the latter an outright ignorant in the field of biblical studies:

M. Picard admire et fort naïvement s’imagine imiter à ses heures la vie monacale, comme un idéal de vie simple conçu par le cerveau aryen. [...] M. Picard, avec la bonne opinion qu’il affiche, ignore bien des choses qu’il devrait savoir⁹².

An adept of scholastic philosophy and logical argumentation, Delattre attacked the inconsistencies and illogical character of Picard’s writings. But above all, one will notice the apologetic character of the criticism. Delattre accused Picard of neglecting the importance of the story of Adam’s fall and of denying the biblical basis of the doctrine of original sin. He also attacked another curious pamphlet of Picard on the Sermon on the Mount⁹³. He not only demonstrated that Picard’s exegesis twisted the sequence and the sense of the Greek text, but he also attacked Socialism as such, and accused Picard of denying the Trinity:

À vous en croire, la sainte Trinité serait une invention ecclésiastique, ajoutée au christianisme de l’Évangile: votre dire, vous le sentez, commence à tourner à votre honte⁹⁴.

This time, the game was played on the doctrinal level, accusing Picard of defending a pantheist position⁹⁵. Delattre’s book is one long diatribe against Picard, condemning him in great detail, quite different from Van Hoonacker, and constantly stressing the importance of defending the Bible as a source of divine revelation. Delattre always remained an advocate and a vehement defender of a purely doctrinal interpretation of Christian faith

90. E. PICARD, in *L’Art Moderne*, 11 March 1894.

91. A.J. DELATTRE, *Le cerveau picaresque*, Brussels, 1897.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

93. E. PICARD, *Le Sermon sur la montagne et le socialisme contemporain*, Brussels, 1896. Picard defended the same opinion in his *Comment on devient socialiste*, Brussels, 1895, pp. 142-143.

94. DELATTRE, *Le cerveau picaresque* (n. 92), pp. 156-157.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

in his polemics with Lagrange and the Louvain professors. Years before these “antimodernist” replies, he took the same role when dealing with Picard. The overarching interest of Delattre’s perspective is, in the end, an epistemological one. The question of truth and its defense ever remains at the core of his writings⁹⁶. I conclude this part by citing the last words of *Le cerveau picaresque*:

Citoyen Picard, vous avez écrit: “Mon cerveau restera celui du penseur!” Après tant de preuves, on a bien le droit de vous dire: Votre cerveau restera le cerveau girouette, tournant à tous les vents de la fantaisie la plus saugrenue⁹⁷.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The story that has been sketched here deals with questioning the sources of Christian faith. In that sense, the subject fits well within the commonly held picture of the Catholic modernist crisis. At stake in this story is the clash between various methodologies in approaching Scripture, and the way in which these contrasting hermeneutics affect the core of the Christian tradition. This essay on the role of Picard, Van Hoonacker and Delattre may help reframe the overall image of the modernist crisis and perhaps constitute a step on the way toward an increased attention to such parties in the crisis that have remained in the margins of scholarly attention. The case of Picard and the question of anti-Semitic bible readings offers an interesting, and very peculiar, case for further study of non-Catholic involvement in a conflict on the study of the sources of Christianity. It opens up an interest in the socio-political side of the modernist crisis that has often escaped the attention of Church historians. On the other hand, the study of Delattre’s role links up with the much required attention to the positions, sensitivities and actions of those often labeled as anti-modernists. In this sense, I hope that the present essay provides an impetus for further research.

In particular, I hope to have shown that the official integration of critical biblical exegesis in the teaching programme of the Faculty of Theology was a direct result of Van Hoonacker’s polemics with Picard. Given Van Hoonacker’s open attitude already in 1889, his appointment to the chair

96. DUBAR, *Le révérend père Delattre* (n. 76), p. 33: “Le fougeux controversiste n’était mû que par une seule passion: l’amour de la Vérité. Il déployait la même ardeur non seulement à redresser les excès de l’hypercritique des protestants et des rationalistes au sujet du texte ou de l’interprétation de la Bible, mais aussi envers des exégètes catholiques qui lui semblaient subir leur influence. Si en discutant leurs opinions il poussait la franchise jusqu’à la rudesse et même la dureté, personne ne contestera qu’il était toujours objectif et qu’il appuyait sur des jugements sur de solides raisons. C’était un joueur redoutable”.

97. DELATTRE, *Le cerveau picaresque* (n. 91), p. 94.

of Old Testament is to be understood as a first and crucial step towards the appointment of Ladeuze later on as the chair of New Testament. That said, the present contribution cannot be more than a first and modest attempt at touching upon elements and issues that require further study.

Tilburg University
Kamer K 716
PO Box 90153
NL-5000 LE Tilburg
Nederland
k.schelkens@uvt.nl

Karim SCHELKENS

ABSTRACT. — The present contribution highlights the development of Orientalist research and historical-critical exegesis in late nineteenth-century Belgium. It investigates the backgrounds of the founding of the first chair in Old Testament exegesis at the Louvain Faculty of Theology in 1889, with the support of Cardinal P.L. Goossens and Rector J.B. Abbeloos. The Belgian episcopate offered the chair to Dr. A. Van Hoonacker as a result of his polemics against the anti-Semitic Bible reading proposed by the Belgian senator E. Picard. The article offers a detailed survey of this quarrel based on previously undisclosed sources and offers insight on the debate on the relationship between Christians and Jews, and on the state of Catholic biblical scholarship on the eve of the modernist crisis.